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THE TEACHING OF CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

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The trustworthiness of the fourth gospel—Differences between it and the synoptic gospels—Considerations that modify the significance of these differences—General consistency of all four accounts—Teachings of the fourth gospel as to the divinity of Jesus—Miracles as manifestations and occasions of teaching—The death of Jesus as a teaching—Christ and man's inner life.

THE title of this paper confronts us with the necessity of enquiring whether the discourses and sayings of Jesus reported in the fourth gospel may be accepted as genuine; whether, in short, there are any "teachings of Christ" in the Gospel of John. Many critics of repute have held and hold that the words ascribed to our Lord in this gospel are wholly or almost wholly fictitious. And there is so much plausibility in what they adduce in support of this averment, and so much real difficulty in the way of accepting as genuine all that we find in this gospel ascribed to Christ that it is imperative to come to some understanding in the matter.

What test, then, can we apply to the discourses reported in the fourth gospel; have we any criterion by which they may be judged? The reports in the synoptic gospels at once suggest themselves as the required criterion. Doubts there may be regarding the very words ascribed to our Lord in this or that passage of the synoptists, doubts there must be whether we are to follow Matthew or Luke when these two differ; but practically there is no doubt at all even among extreme critics that we may gather from those gospels a clear idea both of the form and of the substance of our Lord's teaching.

Now it is not to be denied that the comparison of the fourth gospel with the first three is a little disconcerting. For it is obvious that in the fourth gospel the discourses occupy a different position, and differ also both in style and in matter from

those recorded in the synoptical gospels. They occupy a different position, bulking much more largely in proportion to the narrative. Indeed the narrative portion of the Gospel of John may be said to exist for the sake of the verbal teaching. The miracles which in the first three gospels appear as the beneficent acts of our Lord without ulterior motive seem in the fourth gospel to exist for the sake of the teaching they embody and the discussions they give rise to. Similarly, the persons introduced, such as Nicodemus, are viewed chiefly as instrumental in eliciting from Jesus certain sayings and are themselves forgotten in the conversation they have suggested.

In form the teachings recorded in *John* conspicuously differ from those recorded by the other evangelists. They present our Lord as using three forms of teaching, brief, pregnant apothegms, parables, and prolonged ethical addresses. In *John*, it is alleged, the parable has disappeared, the pointed sayings suitable to a popular teacher have also disappeared, and in their place we have prolonged discussions, self-defensive explanations, and stern invectives. As Renan says: "This fashion of preaching and demonstrating without ceasing, this everlasting argumentation, this artificial get-up, these long discussions following each miracle, these discourses stiff and awkward, whose tone is so often false and unequal, are intolerable to a man of taste alongside the delicious sentences of the synoptists."

Even more marked is the difference in the *substance* of the discourses. From the synoptists we receive the impression that Jesus was a genial, ethical teacher who spent his days among the common people exhorting them to unworldliness, to a disregard of wealth, to the humble and patient service of God in love to their fellow-men, exposing the hollowness of much that passed for religion and seeking to inspire all men with firmer trust in God as their Father. In the Gospel of John, His own claims are the prominent subject. He is the subject matter taught as well as the teacher. The kingdom of God no longer holds the place it held in the synoptists; it is the Messiah rather than the Messianic kingdom that is pressed upon the people.

On the other hand it has been urged that the style ascribed



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to our Lord in this gospel is so like the style of John himself as to be indistinguishable; so that it is not always possible to say where the words of Jesus end and the words of John begin (see 12:44; 3:18-21). This difficulty may, however, be put aside, and that, for more reasons than one. The words of Jesus are translated from the vernacular Aramaic in which he probably uttered them and it was impossible they should not be colored by the style of the translator. Besides, there are obvious differences between the style of John and that of Jesus. For example, the Epistle of John is singularly abstract and devoid of illustration. James abounds in figure, and so does Paul; but in John's epistles not a single simile or metaphor occurs. Is it credible that this writer was the author of the richly figurative teachings in the 10th and 15th chapters of the gospel (the shepherd and the vine)?

But turning to the real differences which exist between the reports of the first three and the fourth gospel, several thoughts occur which at least take off the edge of the criticism and show us that on a point of this kind it is easy to be hasty and extreme. For, in the first place, it is to be considered that if John had had nothing new to tell, no fresh aspect of Christ or his teaching to present, he would not have written at all. No doubt each of the synoptists goes over ground already traversed by his fellow-synoptist, but it has yet to be proved that they knew one another's work. John did know of their gospels, and the very fact that he added a fourth prepares us to expect that it will be different; not only in omitting scenes from the life of Christ with which already the previous gospels had made men familiar, but by presenting some new aspect of Christ's person and teaching. That there was another aspect essential to the completeness of the figure was, as Dean Chadwick has pointed out, also to be surmised. The synoptists enable us to conceive how Jesus addressed the peasantry and how he dealt with the Scribes of Capernaum; but, after all, was it not also of the utmost importance to know how he was received by the authorities of Jerusalem and how he met their difficulties about his claims? Had there been no record of these defenses of his position, must we

not still have supposed them and supplied them in imagination?

That we have here, then, a *different* aspect of Christ's teaching need not surprise us, but is it not even *inconsistent* with that already given by the synoptists? The universal Christian consciousness has long since answered that question. The faith which has found its resting place in the Christ of the synoptists is not unsettled or perplexed by anything it finds in John. They are not two Christs but one which the four gospels depict: diverse as the profile and front face, but one another's complement rather than contradiction. A critical examination of the gospels reaches the same conclusion. For while the self-assertiveness of Christ is more apparent in the fourth gospel, it is implicit in them all. Can any claim be greater than that which our Lord urges in the Sermon on the Mount, to be the supreme lawgiver and judge of men? Or than that which is implied in his assertion that he only knows the Father, and that only through him can others know Him; or can we conceive any clearer confidence in his mission than that which he implies when he invites all men to come to him, and trust themselves with him, or when he forgives sin, and proclaims himself the Messiah, God's representative on earth?

Can we then claim that all that is reported in this gospel as uttered by our Lord was actually spoken as it stands? This is not claimed. Even the most conservative critics allow that John must necessarily have condensed conversations and discourses. The truth probably is that we have the actual words of the most striking sayings, because these, once heard, could not be forgotten. And this plainly applies especially to the sayings regarding himself which were most likely to astonish or even shock and startle the hearers. These at once and forever fixed themselves in the mind. In the longer discussions and addresses we have the substance but cannot at each point be sure that the very words are given. No doubt in the last resort we must trust John. But whom could we more reasonably trust? He was the person of all others who entered most fully into sympathy with Christ and understood him best, the person to whom our Lord

could most freely open his mind. So that although, as Godet says, we have here "the extracted essence of a savoury fruit" we may be confident that this essence perfectly preserves the flavor and peculiarity of the fruit.

On finding that we may accept this gospel as a trustworthy representation of one aspect of our Lord's teaching, we turn to it and learn that the writer's aim is to reproduce the self-manifestation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. With admirable artistic skill he collects from the life of our Lord those acts and words which most distinctly reveal his Messianic dignity, and he so presents them as to bring out, stage by stage, the growing faith and the ever deepening alienation and hatred which this manifestation elicited. The gospel is essentially an apologetic intended to establish the claim of Jesus to be received as the Christ, the Anointed, in other words, the spiritually equipped representative of God among men. And it accomplishes its object not by an abstract argument, nor like Matthew by showing how Jesus fulfilled prophecy, but by the simple method of gathering from the life of our Lord those words and deeds which most conspicuously and convincingly exhibit his actual revelation of the Father and application of his goodness to men.

The whole teaching of the gospel becomes intelligible when we keep in view that it was the author's purpose to select all that might most distinctly assure men that Jesus was the messenger of God and all that most cordially and pointedly invites men to accept what God sends them. In accordance with this the favorite title by which our Lord designates himself is "He whom the Father hath sent" (5:38; 6:29; 7:29; 17:3, etc.), and a favorite designation of God is "the Father which hath sent me" (5:37; 6:38, 39, 40; 7:16; 8:16, etc.) His great aim is to find acceptance as the Sent of God: "the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (5:36). "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (6:38). Above all, and in the first place, men must recognize him as the Father's ambassador, empowered to reveal the divine love and to express it to men. Whatever be his nature, and whatever be

his previous history, it is not to these that attention is drawn, but to the fact of his being the qualified representative of God on earth, the Messiah. If reference is from time to time made to his nature or previous history, this is incidental to the main purpose which always is to present Christ as the commissioned representative of God to men. Hence we need not be surprised if he says little directly of his divine nature.

At the present time it is gravely doubted whether in any utterance recorded in this gospel Jesus claims to be divine. Professor Beyschlag especially has spent much ingenuity in so explaining the passages which have usually been construed in this sense, as to leave no such claim apparent. The title "Son of God" is a Messianic designation and carries with it no intimation of eternal divine existence as son. The expressions which seem to involve the affirmation of preëxistence (6 : 62 ; 8 : 58 ; 17 : 4, 5, 24) only mean that the ideal man existed from eternity in the mind of God. And although he frequently speaks of himself as sent by God and coming down from heaven, these modes of speech are equally applicable and sometimes applied to other men.

Much service has been done by Professor Beyschlag and his fellow workers in compelling us to a stricter exegesis. There is no doubt that the designation "Son of God" is a Messianic title and is sometimes used in this sense in this gospel. Yet this does not explain why Jesus so constantly speaks of himself as "*the* Son" while speaking of God as "the Father." This constant setting of himself, in distinction from other men, in a relation of sonship to the Father, produced in the mind of the Jews the impression that he made himself equal with God. And, what is more to the purpose, the same impression was produced upon the mind of John, his most intimate and best-instructed disciple. It is manifest from the prologue that John believed Jesus to be the Logos or the Eternal Son of God, and how our Lord could have permitted this impression to be left on his mind, if it were erroneous, is not easy to understand. When Jesus declared that he was before Abraham, those who heard him understood him to mean that he was personally alive before Abraham ; and if they had thought otherwise and that Jesus only

meant to affirm that he existed from eternity in the mind of God, might not they themselves have claimed a similar existence? Certainly the writers who entered most fully into the mind of Christ were most influential in the permanent establishment of Christianity. John, Paul, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, believed in his preëxistence.

It was, then, as Messiah that Jesus primarily manifested himself. In the synoptical gospels he is also presented as Messiah, but mainly in the character of the founder of the Messianic kingdom. In John it is rather the more essential nature of the Messiah as the revealer of God and mediator between God and men, which is in view. And John's idea of the actual qualifications which constituted Jesus the Messiah may perhaps most readily be gathered from the miracles recorded. The miracles selected are those which best serve as object lessons, or manifestations in the physical world, of some particular element in the equipment of the Messiah. In these miracles Jesus was the bearer and dispenser of the Father's good-will, and he desired that in and through them he might be recognized as such, and be trusted as the medium through whom men might come into connection with the whole divine fulness.

Accordingly, as the miracles were meant to tell their own story, their teaching is obvious. In the supply of wine which he furnished for the prolongation of the wedding festivities at Cana, there was manifested his glory as the reliever of all poverty and provider of all innocent joy. When he summoned into life and activity the hopelessly impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, it was made apparent that "the Son quickeneth whom he will." In giving sight to the man born blind he revealed himself, more convincingly than by any verbal teaching, as the light of the world; and when he fed the hungry out of his own stores, the intelligent might have seen that he who could thus sustain the body might be trusted as able also to give the bread that endureth to life everlasting. In the crowning miracle of the raising of Lazarus he reveals himself as the resurrection, inviting men to believe that the life he communicates is undying. By these miracles, therefore, he proclaimed himself to men as carrying in his person a divine fulness of life,—the very life of God, as he him-

self says (6:26) and as imparting this life freely to men. "Life" or "life eternal" is the favorite term in this gospel to express the all-comprehending good which Christ brings to men.

That our Lord foresaw that in order to give this "life" its fullest application to men his own death was necessary, is apparent from several passages. Conspicuous among these are his comparison of his own exaltation to the raising of the brazen serpent on the pole (3:14) and the similar language of chapter 12:32, where he intimates that it is by being lifted up he will obtain ascendancy over all men. In the same chapter he utters the memorable words, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." It is to minimize the significance of these utterances to find in them only another way of saying, "It is expedient for you that I go away," and to suppose that he looked upon death chiefly as "the passage into a state of glory in which he could act effectively and truly live with his own." It was that; but it was that by virtue of its atoning efficacy. The representative and substitutionary character of his death is brought out in the parable of the Good Shepherd and in his acceptance of the designation applied to him by the Baptist, "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." The only way in which a lamb can remove sin is by bearing it as a vicarious victim.

Further, in this gospel our Lord throws much light on the means by which men actually become recipients of the life which Christ brings. Evidently there must in the first place be faith in his words and in his person (5:24; 6:29, 68; 1:12, etc.). But the character of this faith and the entireness of the reception which are requisite for making men partakers of the life that is in Christ are most distinctly brought out in the figure of eating and drinking which he uses in the sixth chapter. It is by eating we assimilate to our own life the nutritive properties of our food; so Christ says we must make him as thoroughly our own as eating makes bread our own. We must make his spirit our own, assimilate to ourselves all that is in him to encourage, to guide, to sanctify. We must so use him for all spiritual purposes that we can understand what it means to be one with him. So eating him we possess life eternal.